

# Victorian Home Life

## Pre-workshop Information

### Session Outline

This session allows pupils to explore the theme of Victorian domestic life using the familiar task of doing the laundry. Pupils will help a member of Museum staff as they try and do the laundry in the style of a Victorian laundry maid, using real and replica items from the Museum's collection. They will use their prior knowledge, investigative skills and imaginations to complete the task, whilst at the same time exploring the differences between home life then and now and developing their understanding of the past.

Pupils will participate in an interactive question and answer session before taking on the role of a Victorian laundry maid themselves. In small groups they will use washboards, carbolic soap, possums and flat irons to do their own pile of laundry. Finally, pupils will have the opportunity to discuss how domestic life has changed over time, and consider how and why these changes have occurred.

**Session Duration: 1 hour**

### Curriculum Links

This session supports the following areas of the KS1 National Curriculum:

- identifying differences between ways of life at different times
- finding out about the past from a range of sources of information
- asking and answering questions about the past using subject-specific vocabulary

It also links to QCA units:

- How were homes long ago different from homes today?
- What would we find inside people's homes a long time ago?
- What can we find out about Victorian times from looking at household objects?

### Learning Objectives

The session will provide children with opportunities to:

- find out more about domestic life in the Victorian era using handling artefacts
- communicate what they know about the Victorian era and homes from the past
- develop their understanding of the passing of time and use associated vocabulary
- participate individually and in small groups

### **What We Expect**

- Children will think about their own lives and make comparisons with people living in different times and places.
- Children will enjoy learning in an interactive way using objects and costume.
- Whilst Museum staff will run the session, support in the classroom is required in order to minimise the risks involved with the session items, enforce the school's behaviour policy and ensure artefacts are handled appropriately.
- Your institution will reimburse the museum for the cost of any item/items that need to be replaced due to loss/theft/breakage (through inappropriate behaviour) during the programme.
- If you have booked an outreach session please see the outreach conditions email for additional requirements.

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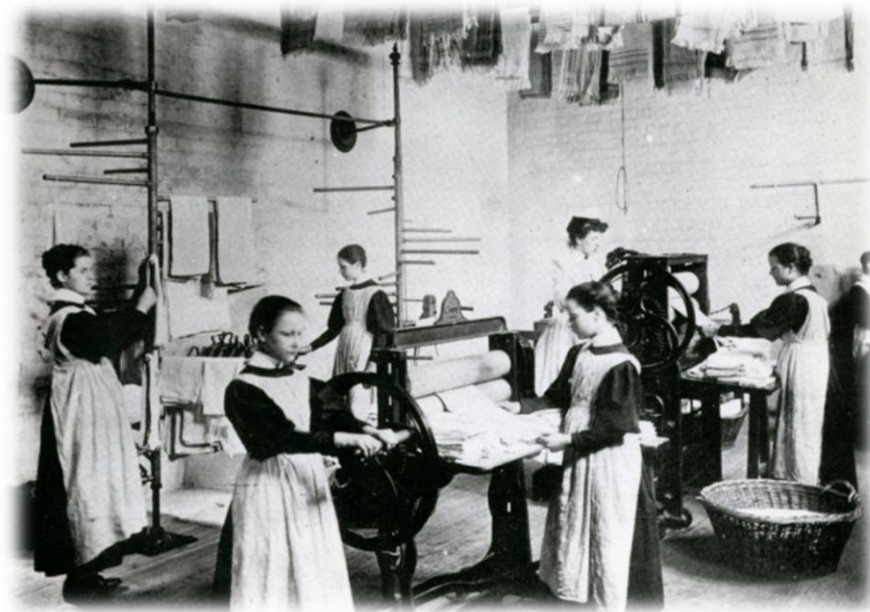
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### Information for Teachers

The Victorian age saw Wandsworth transformed from a mainly rural collection of villages outside London to part of the city's suburbs. New transport links were created, industries sprang up, institutions were founded and the population of Wandsworth greatly increased. The shape of Wandsworth as we know it today was largely created by the Victorians.

Keeping clothes clean has been an essential concern for thousands of years. However, the modern electric washing machine we are all familiar with did not come into existence until the 1900s. Until the development of the washing machine, hand-washing clothing was an extremely laborious process; it might take three days to wash and rinse the clothes in a large Victorian household, and two more to mangle, starch and iron them. The life of a laundry maid would have been extremely tough by modern standards. Servants were early to rise and late getting to bed, and time off from work was a rare luxury. By the 1880s, servants were given a half-day off on Sundays, starting after lunch. Scrubbing linen with harsh carbolic soap would have left hands sore and chapped.

Few women were employed solely as laundry maids – to afford to employ a servant for a single task required a lot of money. Despite this fact, laundry maids did not enjoy high status amongst domestic servants. On average, laundry maids earned only £13 per year for what would have been very physically demanding work.



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## Pre-workshop Information

### Pre-visit Ideas for Activities

1. Discuss the different ways we keep our clothes and our homes clean. Ask the children what kinds of objects we use around the home, and think about how these might have been different in the past e.g. before electricity, running water. Using Worksheet 1, ask the children to match the modern and old domestic objects according to their function.
2. Ask the children to imagine what it would be like to work in a large Victorian household. Discuss having to get up very early in the morning, not earning much money or having much holiday, and the different jobs that would need to be done e.g. lighting the fires, heating the water, preparing food etc. How might it feel to be a Victorian laundry maid? Children can write a short story or poem based on your discussion.
3. Think about the differences between rich and poor people living in the Victorian era, and lives of rich and poor children in particular. What might their homes look like? What kind of clothes might they have worn? What toys did they play with? Did they go to school or work? Ask the children to make a list of the differences between rich and poor Victorians.
4. Ask the children to interview their family members about how clothes were washed in their homes when they were young. Encourage them to ask family members of different generations, and discuss how the laundry process has changed.



#### ❖ THE MAID'S DAY ❖

5.30 am	Clean kitchen floors
6.00 am	Heat water
6.30 am	Wake seniors, lay and light fires, lay servants' breakfast, deliver nursery breakfast
7.30 am	Water and tea-trays to family, empty chamber-pots
7.45 am	Servants' breakfast
8.30 am	Prayers
9.00 am	Family breakfast
9.30 am	Clear and clean
12.00 pm	Lunch, servants' hall and nursery
1.00 pm	Family lunch
2.30 pm	Clear lunch, rest
4.30 pm	Tea-trays for household
5.30 pm	Servants' tea, nursery tea
6.00 pm	Lay dinner, help in kitchen
7.00 pm	Family dinner, serve and clear
9.00 pm	Servants' supper
10.00 pm	Bed



**Worksheet 1.** Match the old and new cleaning items!





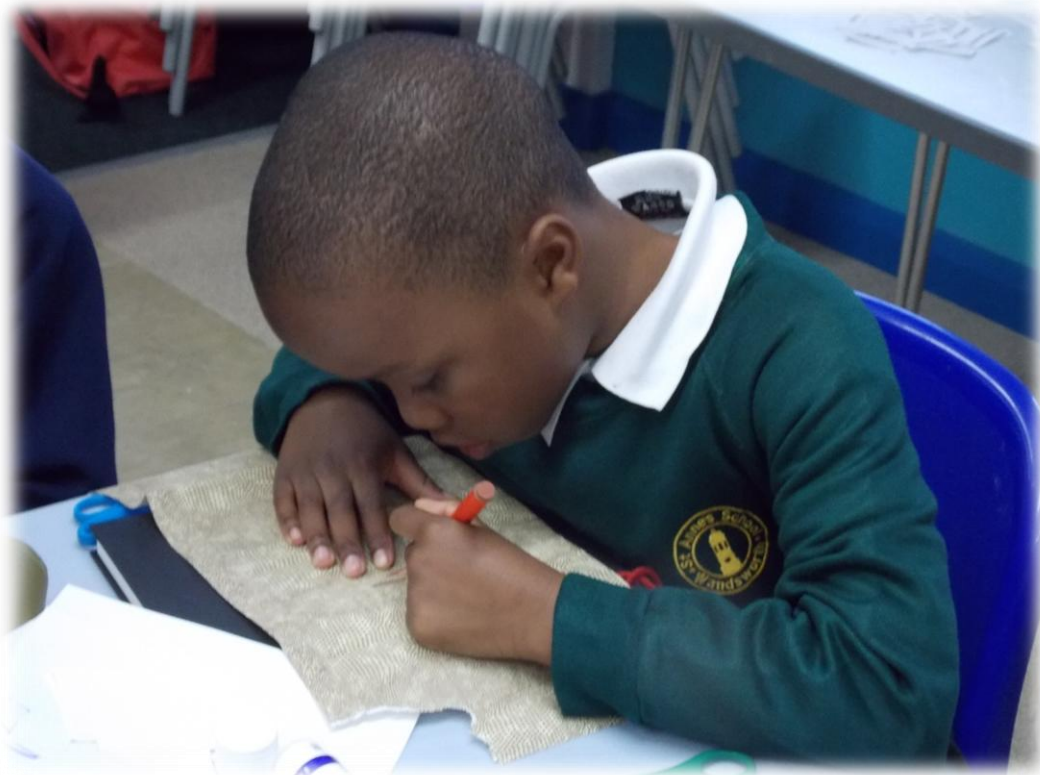
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## Post-workshop Resources

We very much hope you enjoyed your Victorian Home Life workshop and we would be very grateful to hear your views on this or other elements of the Museum's learning programme. If you have any comments or concerns that have not been addressed in our evaluation, please contact us at [bookings@wandsworthmuseum.co.uk](mailto:bookings@wandsworthmuseum.co.uk).

The following resources are designed to support you and your pupils after participation in the Victorian Home Life workshop. Below you will find more details about some of the objects featured in the session.

**Please note:** If you have not yet participated in the workshop, please do not reveal the content to the participants as this will lessen the impact of the workshop.





### Laundry Maid's Uniform

Most Victorian maids wore a white pinafore over a long black uniform dress with sturdy boots. This uniform was mostly worn when maids were on show to the members of the household and their guests. For the hard work done behind the scenes, a simpler form of this dress would have been worn. White caps were worn to keep hair out of the face. Maids were usually expected to buy their own uniforms when they started work, which might have cost them between £4 and £5 – over a third of their yearly salary.

### Tin Bath

Tin baths like this one were used to hold the laundry and soapy water. It would have been difficult to keep water hot in these metal tubs, meaning that large quantities of water would need to be heated throughout the day. As well as being used for laundry, many Victorian people bathed themselves in tin baths, crouching down or standing in the tub and scrubbing themselves clean.



### Coal

The Industrial Revolution led to the large-scale use of coal for energy – it became vital to nearly every Victorian household, as well as to industry and transport. In the home it was used to make fires for heating and lighting. Coal-fired stoves and copper boilers were used to heat water and flat irons for doing the laundry.



### Short-handled Posser

Posseres were used to pound laundry and remove dirt from clothes. Some had a wooden cross-piece used to make a twisting motion. The underside of the copper dome was concave and had holes in it to create suction, making the job of the maid slightly easier. Nonetheless, using the posser would have been hard work.



**Washboard**

Washboards consisted of a wooden frame with a sheet of corrugated iron or glass set inside. The washboard would be placed inside the tin bath and clothes would be scrubbed against the ribbed surface, encouraging the removal of stains. Like using the posser, this would have been physically demanding work.

**Carbolic Soap**

Carbolic soap was the first anti-septic widely produced, and was a staple in most Victorian household. It contained a mixture of soap and carbolic acid, and was bought in huge slabs before being cut down to make individual bars. It was used to clean clothes, chamber pots and a variety of other things around the home, and many people washed their bodies with it as well.

**Flat Iron**

Before electricity, irons like this were heated on an open fire or range. Because they would cool so quickly whilst being worked over the linen, it was common to use two, one being heated up while one was being used. The handle being metal, it would have had to have been picked up using a cloth of some kind. Flat irons were quite heavy, and would have required a strong arm.



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## Post-workshop Resources

### Post-visit Activities

1. Ask the children if they can remember the different steps involved in doing the laundry like a Victorian maid. Write them down on a whiteboard or flip chart and put them in the correct order as a class.
2. Write a short diary entry as a Victorian laundry maid. Encourage the children to write about the jobs the maid would have done, the clothes she wore, what her life might have been like and how she might have felt about it.
3. Think about how laundry and other household equipment has changed since the Victorian era. Design a futuristic washing/cleaning device, thinking about how to make the task of doing the laundry even easier.

